

Public Testimony Before Joint Legislative Committee on Human Services
Regarding Raised Bill # 5321 – Interpreter Qualifications
Thursday, March 13, 2014

Senator Gayle Slossberg and Rep. Catherine Abercrombie, Co-Chairs & Members of Human Services Committee,

I am Dr. Harvey Corson, Past President of Connecticut Association of the Deaf (CAD), Co-Chair of the CAD Education and Legislative Committee, and Member of the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf (CRID) Task Force on Interpreting. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak before you about this bill.

Since the original enactment of this law and subsequent changes in statutes in 1998 and 2007, there have been significant changes within the interpreting profession serving deaf and hard of hearing persons and within the state of Connecticut.

During 2012 - 2013 the Deaf and Interpreting communities collaborated in establishing and conducting a Task Force on Interpreting 1) to review the status of interpreting services being provided within Connecticut and how we fared compared with other states and 2) to recommend proposed needed updating of the current interpreter law, CT General Statutes, Chapter 814, Section 46a - 33a.

Here is a summary of the issues and concerns that were observed:

****In 1998 there were primarily two interpreting referral agencies, the CT Commission of the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) which was merged into the new CT Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) effective July 1, 2011 and FSW (Family Services Woodfield), a non-profit agency in Bridgeport, working in the state. Presently, there are several national referral agencies that advertise they can provide services within the state, primarily through remote access. There is no one monitoring that the interpreters these agencies are using are qualified and in compliance with our CT statute.**

****Traditionally school systems have hired the least qualified interpreters. This has a significant, long-term impact on the language and communication development of deaf and hard of hearing children with whom they work. Many of these "interpreters" do not meet the requirements as put forth in the statute. Often, to avoid compliance some school districts use other labels and job titles, such as communication facilitator, communication assistant, or teacher aide, when in fact the person is actually providing "interpreting" services as was outlined in the statute.**

****Within the interpreting field, the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (NRID) has recently changed its testing and certification requirements. There has been a focus on upgrading educational and training requirements and improving the overall quality and professionalism of those working within the field.**

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****Nationally, the Deaf and Interpreting communities are requiring that qualified interpreters meet higher expectations and standards as the lives of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and adults can literally depend on the skills of their interpreters. A recent example of this effort is the “Deaf Child’s Bill of Rights”, included in section 11 of CT PA 12-173, An Act Concerning Individualized Education Programs and Other Issues Relating to Special Education, requiring a Language and Communication Plan be developed for every child identified as Deaf or Hard of Hearing by the Planning and Placement Team (PPT).**

****Due to the fact that there was no monitoring of interpreters working in CT, and no penalties for those who were not in compliance, we have seen broad disregard for the law. Additionally, the original statute provided for no penalties to those who did not comply. This has led to substandard provision of interpreting services in many situations, which can lead to serious outcomes. A recent example can be seen in an unqualified sign language interpreter selected to interpret on stage in a world-wide media coverage of the memorial service for former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa last December.**

Based on these concerns, and with a commitment to improving and maintaining the quality of interpreting services provided in Connecticut, the CRID Task Force on Interpreting is pleased to see its recommended needed updating/changes incorporated in this proposed legislation --

- 1) Update the qualifications and requirements in compliance with the national certifying body, the National Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf;
- 2) Clarifying the areas of interpreting settings and the institution of a registering fee for all interpreters and any business entity, within the state or located out of state providing interpreting services within the state, by electronic or other means; and
- 3) Establishment of a standards and monitoring board to oversee and ensure compliance, investigate complaints, assess penalties to those not in compliance, and to educate those who are securing interpreting services.

Accordingly, this proposed legislation to update and strengthen interpreter standards is in response to the raised expectations within Connecticut and is endorsed by the Connecticut Association of the Deaf, the Connecticut Coalition of Organizations Serving the Deaf, and the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf.

Thank you for your consideration and support of this proposed legislation.